

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S COLUMN - MERCURY APRIL

Events I have attended over the last few weeks have concentrated my thoughts on senior citizens and the young - two groups who deserve a great deal of consideration.

I recently gave a talk to the Gorleston Probus Club - an organization for retired professionals and businessmen. There are several branches in this area and I knew from previous experience that, while the welcome would be warm, some of the questions and discussion would be challenging.

The questions were sharp and well-informed, the two hours flew by and I collected some valuable feedback and food for thought.

I think we tend to undervalue the potential input of our most senior citizens. They have a wealth of experience and keep themselves very up-to-date by reading, surfing the internet or joining networking organizations like Probus. We should listen to them more than we do.

I can't let thoughts of our more elderly residents go without turning to the excellent work the Council's staff does on their behalf.

Sheltered housing offers residents not only the independence of having their own accommodation, it is backed with the knowledge that help is constantly on hand. It also gives tenants the opportunity of a good social life.

Keeping warm through the winter is a priority for many elderly people, some even have to make the decision whether to eat properly or to have the heating on.

In the rural areas of the borough the cost of heating oil is a concern to some of our tenants. In response to this the Council has been fitting heat pumps, a device which uses heat from the out atmosphere to warm people's home and cut costs.

Young people also get a great deal of attention from us. It comes in many forms from our housing department providing accommodation, to ways of keeping people healthy through the many sport and other activities funded and run by the Council.

There is a vast range of 'things to do' such as the free swimming which began in April, but it isn't only sport - there are also dance classes, music, or even opportunities to develop careers in the creative industries.

At the other end of the spectrum there is not much to celebrate in the world of child protection just now. A series of high profile cases have shown how easily vulnerable children can slip through the nets of the various public services they come into contact with.

One of my weightier duties is as a member of Norfolk's Local Safeguarding Children Board. It is responsible for ensuring that the relevant services have proper procedures in place to identify and protect children from harm and abuse.

It also carries out initial investigations of instances where a child has suffered serious harm or abuse.

The recent Laming Report, prompted by the 'Baby P' case, makes uncomfortable reading for service directors but Laming is absolutely right to say that senior managers cannot pass the buck to frontline staff. The introduction and first couple of chapters set out the issues in a compelling and jargon-free way - recommended reading for any senior manager.

To end on a positive note, I spent the Sunday before Easter on Yarmouth Seafront. The sun was shining, the spring bedding plants looked superb, at 3pm there wasn't a spot of litter to be seen and the place was really busy with lots of smiling faces.

Lets hope that sets the standard for the rest of the season!

